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Mission possible, thanks to FedEx

Water-purification systems now have transportation

By David MacDougall

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Water Missions International, a Charleston-based charity that has been having trouble getting more of its water-purification systems into earthquake-ravaged Haiti, got a big boost to its efforts Wednesday when FedEx chartered a cargo flight to Port-au-Prince.

"This is the most exciting day for us," said Molly Greene, who founded Water Missions with her husband, George, in 2001. Water Missions is a Christian, nonprofit organization that provides safe drinking water to people in developing countries and disaster areas.

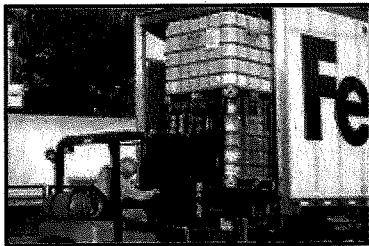


Photo by David MacDougall

Harold Johnson, a volunteer with Water Missions International, loads water-treatment systems bound for Haiti into a FedEx trailer on Wednesday.

"Haiti needed clean water before the earthquake," Greene said. The need is even greater now.

As Greene was speaking, volunteers were loading a pair of FedEx trailers parked outside the group's West Ashley office with Living Water Treatment Systems. Each system was packed in four separate palletized crates. Two of the crates hold water tanks. The other two hold equipment.

Each system can clean up contaminated surface water and generate 6,000 gallons of drinkable water a day, Greene said. They can be set up to run on solar power.

Using forklifts, the volunteers had to be careful to load the trailers so that all four crates for each system were packed together.

The total weight for each system is about 1,600 pounds, said Jerry P. Miner, Water Missions vice president for disaster response. The two FedEx trailers were to haul 10

systems to Miami, where they were to be loaded onto a flight directly to Port-Au-Prince, he said.

FedEx has been a strategic partner with Water Missions for years, and has been helping the group get treatment systems to Miami since the 7.0- magnitude quake rocked Haiti on Jan. 12. "But this time they are funding the whole project," Greene said.

Adam Spurlock, an account executive for FedEx in Charleston, said the company was proud to support Water Missions. He said the regular air-freight cost of transporting one treatment system would be about \$10,000. Then there would be \$2,000 or so for ground transportation, he said. For 10 systems, the transportation cost would exceed \$100,000, he said.

Greene said there have been widely reported logistical problems getting aid into Haiti, which have affected Water Missions. Also, the group has said it would prefer that C-17s leaving Charleston Air Force Base transport the systems. But Water Missions was told that military flights have been dedicated to other supplies.

Since the quake, Water Missions has sent systems into Haiti on flights arranged by larger charities, such as Samaritan's Purse and Operation Blessing.

"This is the first actual flight for Water Missions International since the earthquake," Greene said of the FedEx flight.

Water Missions already had been operating several water-treatment systems in Haiti before the earthquake. One in Jacmel was deployed in 2008 after the island was struck by a hurricane, Miner said. Relief coordinators in Haiti have asked Water Missions to set up one of its systems near Haiti's border with the Dominican Republic, Miner said. "A lot of the people are fleeing to the Dominican Republic," he said.

There were four Water Missions employees who were already stationed in Haiti and they came through the earthquake without injuries, Miner said.

They also survived Wednesday's aftershock, which occurred around sunrise while many were sleeping. The 5.9-magnitude aftershock sent thousands more running out of their homes to live in the streets of the city or in the countryside.

How to help

Here is a list of organizations accepting donations:

Water Missions International is preparing water-purification systems for deployment to Haiti. Anyone who wants to help can do so online at watermissions.org or by calling 769-7395 or toll free 866-280-7107. To donate \$10, text 'WMI' to 85944. Text 'YES' when asked to confirm. The amount will be added to your next cellular phone bill. Or you can mail donations to Water Missions International, PO Box 31258, Charleston, SC 29417.

To donate \$10 to the American Red Cross, text 'Haiti' to 90999. The amount will be added to your next phone bill. The organization also is accepting donations through its

International Response Fund, www.redcross.org. You can donate through the local Red Cross chapter by calling 764-2323, ext. 355, or make a secure donation online at lowcountryredcross.org.

To find out how to help the International Rescue Committee, visit theIRC.org or call toll free, 877-REFUGEE. To donate to Oxfam's emergency appeal, visit oxfam.org.uk

InterAction, a coalition of U.S.-based international nongovernmental organizations, has a list of agencies responding and how to donate to them. Find it at

www.interaction.org/crisis-list/earthquake-haiti

Family inquires: To inquire about family in Haiti, call 888-407-4747.

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